

July 24 / Administration of George Bush, 1992

Let that new ticket talk about change, and I'll lay my record up against them any single day for constructive change for the United States. We have changed the world; now help me constructively change the United States of America.

Thank you all, and God bless you. Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 1 p.m. in Golden Gate Park. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Michael A. Duncan of Brookville.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Families in Columbia, Missouri

July 24, 1992

The President. Well, Governor, all yours, sir.

Governor John Ashcroft. Well, President Bush, the members of the National Commission on Urban American Families and these Missouri families, we're all pleased to be here with you this afternoon. I'm delighted to welcome you back to Missouri, to welcome the Commission to Missouri. I'm pleased that these families are here to share their unique stories of work, their commitment, the kind of intensity and industry that's needed to build strong families and hold them together.

We thank you for making families a priority, Mr. President. Until you became the spokesperson who was emphasizing families, I think families were becoming America's forgotten people. But thanks to your care and concern, Americans are turning towards home, and we think that's very important.

Your Commission is working aggressively to fulfill our mission as outlined in your Executive order. In the 77 days since we received our charter, we've worked hard to find out what can be done to strengthen families. We've been in Oakland and San Francisco in California, and Minneapolis in Minnesota, in Dallas in Texas, and Washington, DC. And just yesterday, we visited a place that, well, you're very concerned about; we were in south central Los Angeles. In the coming months, we'll also be hearing from families and experts in New York and Chicago and Knoxville. Mr. President, your Commission is a hard-working one.

The President. I might interrupt to say thank you to the Commission members.

Some of them came a long, long way, the Governor was telling me, and others have a long way to go in returning home. But thank you for what you're doing. And please tell the others I'm very, very grateful, anxious to hear. But excuse the interruption.

Governor Ashcroft. No, that's quite all right. We've heard from a wide variety of people from the academic, public officials, policy analysts, activists, but most of all, we've heard from families in every area. In city after city, we've heard them tell us that the troubling concerns about the condition of family life in America are broadly held. They're shared concerns. People understand that families indeed are in trouble, and when we have troubled families, that makes for troubled neighborhoods. Families are telling us that society is somehow polluting or contaminating the family atmosphere. Analysts see the trend of family decline as part of a cultural shift in our society away from valuing family and community in favor of emphasizing self-indulgence.

Our statistics that we're developing indicate that family decline is a problem that's common to all Americans, black, white, rich, as well as poor. Family breakdown shatters lives whether it's in the affluent suburbs or in—hurts the children in small towns as well as large cities.

But we're also hearing that people have hope. Many are filled with optimism and are relearning the value and strength that can be found in support of American fami-

lies. We're discovering that America is blessed with good volunteers, people who have great spirit and tremendous heart and are tremendously committed to sharing. There are professionals who are dedicated to helping as well.

So, Mr. President, we thank you for meeting with us, and we thank you for caring deeply about America's families. We'd invite you to speak with us about your sense of these matters. And then I'd like to introduce you to some of these Missouri families who've come—

The President. I would only add that, in the first place, I'm very grateful to Governor Ashcroft and former Mayor Strauss for heading up this important effort. It's non-partisan. It is national in scope. It simply says we must explore ways to strengthen the family. Some of that, I expect, might be recommendations changing laws so that it will encourage people who now make a little more dough who live apart to stay together. I'm sure it will get into other items that are affected by legislation.

The main thing is we've got the emphasis here on the right thing. I will simply repeat to the Commissioners and to these families what I've heard from two recent groups of mayors, both of them: one, the National League of Cities; the other, the black mayors association I met with the other day. Both of them said that the major cause for concern and cause for the problems in urban America was the decline of the family. So they're saying, "Hey, help us find ways to strengthen family."

That's what motivated—actually, it was the National League of Cities that suggested that we do this, make this a national Commission, make this something national. Of course, I was proud to announce it back in the State of the Union meeting. And I'm just anxious to hear from you or from some of these families what their experience has been.

I also have a little grandparently advice. And that is that all kids, everybody under 12, ought to be released to sit in the shade of that tree over there or go inside if they want to. That's my position as President, but you don't have to do it. *[Laughter]* But otherwise, I think you might enjoy it. Because I know if I were a kid, I'd be a little

restless out there, especially if I was all dressed up like you are. *[Laughter]* So you ought to feel free to go sit under a nice, cool tree over there, but don't forget to come back to your parents because they love you very much. Maybe there's a place inside, I don't know. You can explore around there, but don't get lost.

All right. Now who's going to—John, what's going to happen?

Governor Ashcroft. Well, we have a number of Missouri families with us today who are examples of how public, how private, how religious programs can work to strengthen families. Of course, we expect you to ask questions. But I want to invite Commission members also to make remarks.

[At this point, participants described the operation and beneficial effects of various programs.]

The President. That's great.

Governor Ashcroft. The Cochair of this Commission is Mayor Strauss of Dallas, Texas, and she's been a great Commission member in every respect. Go right ahead.

Mayor Strauss. Thank you, Governor. Have we heard from everybody? The families?

Governor Ashcroft. I think we have, yes.

Mayor Strauss. Because I feel moved as a member of this Commission, as Cochair, to say to you, Mr. President, how much we appreciate the fact that you have put this at the top of your agenda. It's not that it's anything new to you because we know that there are many, many programs, Federal programs and encouragement of the private sector, to help those who need help: families, the poor, the ill, the elderly.

But this new thrust is going to do so much good. I thank you for the opportunity to be a member of this Commission and to travel all over America and hear the voice of America telling us that problems that are so threatening to all of us, teenage pregnancy and gangs and crime and drugs, school dropout, so many are the result of the breakdown of the family and, in turn, perpetuate the breakdown of the family.

The President. Yes.

Mayor Strauss. So we want you to know

we have heard you. We know what your goal is, and we will do everything in our power to meet that goal and provide for a better future for the people of this country. And we thank you.

The President. Thanks for those kind words.

But is it too early to ask the Commissioners, are you beginning—of course, the Commission's been, what, in effect 70 days or something like that, 77 days, traveled to many States, which I think is very important. Because I think it's important that when the report comes in, it has a national concept to it, that it isn't regional in any sense. I think that's important.

But is it too early for the Commissioners to indicate, or do you think the final report will have more in the way of legislative suggestions as to how we'd change things or what new things we can do legislatively to strengthen the family? Or is it going to be more apt to be along the lines of some of the things we've heard here today, community programs, perhaps sponsored and keyed at the State and local level?

Mayor Strauss. It's going to be a combination.

The President. Combination.

Commissioner Alphonso Jackson. In traveling around the country, I think that what we're finding is there are a combination of both. There's going to have to be some legislative changes. But I think more than anything else, it's going to have to come directly from community involvement. As [*inaudible*] said yesterday, each individual community is going to have to make a commitment.

I think what we're finding in traveling around this country—that's been often said that the President's not in touch. I think you're very much in touch. I think the people in this community sense that the family is the key core to change what is happening in our country.

We were in Los Angeles yesterday, and I think it was reinforced again when we had major discussions with producers and directors of major television and movie shows yesterday. It seems in some way that they might be out of touch, but the families were in touch. I think they reiterated that to them. And I think we got something very,

very deep out of that. I think we've traveled to four or five cities, and the more we travel, the more we find out that the families sense that they're in crisis. But there is hope, and the hope is creating community organizations to bring the family back as a basic unit.

So I would say that it's going to take a combination of both.

The President. Right. I didn't know, the Governor did not tell me that you'd met with the media. And I think properly so because I think they need to change some of these things that they're engaged in under the name of entertainment. What we don't hear about are some of the things that they have been able to do, are willing to do. Then I should think that the Commission would look at the great potential if they could be mobilized to do more.

Why I say that is, I went out some time ago now, a long time ago, and they had a meeting of a lot of the leading executives in the media business. They decided that they would dedicate, I think it was one Saturday, maybe more, every cartoon that the kids watch on Saturday to have an antidrug message. That's not necessarily directly family, but clearly, every family would agree use of drugs make it tough on family.

They did it. They did it all. There were no pricetags on it. They just shifted the content of those programs. And I'm wondering if you ought to take, I'm sure you will, but maybe take a look at some positive suggestions along that line of what some of these media outlets and innovation entertainment can do, to do what that one group of people did on that one Saturday. I mean, I think there's tremendous potential there.

I think they'd be open-minded about it. One of the things we've got going, it's not exactly family, but is this partnership, media partnership headed by Jim Burke, remember that ran—you may know him; I think John knows him—ran Johnson & Johnson. He took on a commitment to get a billion dollars of pro bono advertising on the anti-drug scene, and he's up to around \$500 million or \$600 million now. And you see these—I don't know if you remember the one with the fried egg cracking and all that. Well, that was one that they did, total-

ly pro bono, not Government. And they just went and persuaded the networks and others to do this.

David, you were going to say something. But maybe in this whole area of recommending to some of these very powerful media outlets, they can do what you ask of them.

I interrupted you, I know.

Commissioner David Blankenhorn. That's your right. I was going to say that one of the things we're hearing a lot is that—and I believe very strongly—we have to look for ways to bring fathers back into the home. This is really a big issue, as you know. A lot of the indicators we have tell us that child well-being is declining in the country. The biggest reason it's declining is the family breakup, the erosion of marriage. A lot of this is a cultural issue; it can't be legislated. But there are some things in the area of tax policy, welfare law reform, child support payments, and so on that can be done to send good signals and incentives about the importance of fatherhood. To me, that's kind of the core issue out there as regards child well-being that we are hearing as we listen to people.

The President. That's interesting. There's also a kind of disciplinary component of that where a person, a father who takes off and does have a financial obligation set by the court, that that person fulfill that obligation. He can't go off living alone and leave the mother with the kids and leave them hung out there to dry without fulfilling that obligation. So that's already in the mill, people trying to figure out how to do it. But you're right about that.

Governor Ashcroft. Before we leave, I want to call on Irene Johnson from Chicago. She's been a very important member, a valuable member of the Commission. She has the perspective that, well, has resonated with the people who have come to testify in virtually every city to which we've come. Irene, thank you for being here today.

Commissioner Irene Johnson. Thank you very much. Mr. President, it's an honor to meet you in person, and I want to thank you personally for this assignment that you've given us. In reference to your statement about the things that we have found as we go around America, we think that

there will need to be some policy changes also. The communities do have to play a very important part, but the other part that we've heard is that we have to deal with the spiritual aspect, that people have to go back to what America was built on, and that was faith in God. So we hear a lot of families saying that that kind of thread has led them to do community services and the kinds of things that we see families are dealing with, particularly the Jones family and many other families that we have met.

I'm just pleased to know that we believe that you have that spirit of God in you, the reason why you are concerned about the families and gave us this assignment. So we appreciate that, and we are going to do our best in all of that.

The President. You know, it would be very interesting, I don't know how the Commission would determine this, to see, of the families who are having difficulties in the sense, both combination of economic difficulties, remembering what Dave talked about single-parent families, how faith—I don't know how you could; it's so private in one way—but how faith matters, whether they still have the seeds of faith to sustain them or whether they just lost that and perhaps through some ministry could reacquire it. I don't know. I mean, I'd be interested.

What do you think?

Commissioner Josephine Velazquez. In all the programs that we have been viewing, wherever we see that there is a religious factor built into it, a spiritual factor build into the program, you can see that the results you get are so much more positive. So it is a very positive aspect and something that we should look into. We have lost that. And we have been shown—a lot of these families come up to say, and a lot of the children, "Why don't we have our prayer back in schools?"—things that they're missing. We lost it somewhere along the line, and the American people are asking for it to be back.

Commissioner Jackson. I'd like to give you a comment. I think yesterday, Mr. President, in Los Angeles, we had a story told by a young man who is today 27 years old. His mother left under unusual circum-

stances. They lived in Nicholson Gardens, which is a public housing development in Los Angeles. At 17 he had to become the father, the mother of the family. His youngest brother was 2 months old when she left the home. He has raised every one of them.

But he said yesterday the most important thing was his faith and commitment in God and that he had to fight through a court system to keep his sisters and brothers. And now he has become an assistant manager at Nicholas Gardens. But he specifically said to us yesterday that without his deep abiding belief in God, that he could not have made it, and that was the driving force keeping him going every day.

The President. Isn't that fascinating? Gosh.

Governor Ashcroft. Mr. President, we thank you very much for coming and just hearing a little bit of the reflection of what we've been hearing around America from the Commission and also hearing from individuals in Missouri. And these are the type of people, individuals who we've been hearing from in a variety of stops from one coast to the other. And they're inspiring to me in a lot of ways. They've fought through tough odds. Sometimes they've had bad starts. But the possibility of rescuing situa-

tions is coming on strong, putting families back together that had been apart, bringing children back into the home that had been in foster care.

We're inspired. You've given us a challenging but inspiring job. And we just want to thank you for letting us report to you on a little bit of an interim basis and letting us feel again the intensity of your personal concern on this issue.

The President. Well, I'm delighted. And thanks to the Commission members and also to the witnesses, or whatever we call them, these four families that shared this with us. I sit back there in Washington, and it really brings it home much more personally when you hear what individual families have done and are still doing.

As for you kids, next time we do this, it's going to be nice and cool. *[Laughter]* Next time that's the way it's going to be.

Thank you all so much.

Governor Ashcroft. We deliver the report in December. It will be cooler then.

The President. All right. That sounds far off now. *[Laughter]*

Note: The President spoke at 3:25 p.m. in Shelter Gardens Park.

Remarks at the Show Me State Games in Columbia

July 24, 1992

May I salute our great Governor and thank him and all of you for that warm welcome. And to Mary Ann McCollum, our Mayor, thank you, ma'am, for welcoming us to your city, making us feel so at home. May I also salute Gary Filbert, the executive director of these wonderful games; Dr. Jerry Brouder, the chancellor of the university, from whom we've heard. I thought Stephanie, Miss Missouri, did a fantastic job singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" over there. And while we're passing out tributes, I thought that Jordan and Greg did okay on the Pledge of Allegiance, too. Never missed a beat. So thank you very, very much.

For me it's a great pleasure to be back

here, several times I've been here, but back in Columbia. This is the one Tigers den that I'm always happy to walk into. And everybody involved should take great pride in this fantastic Show Me Games. It's marvelous, and our congratulations go out, of course, to all the competitors. I have only one regret, not that I can't compete with you all but that I won't get to see you in action.

The Governor has told me what a marvelous event this is. The games now are, what, in their 7th year, but the spirit really is as old as America itself. And you're all here to do your best in a tough competition. The Olympic creed, I'm sure some of you are